

Rabbit Personalities

People often ask questions like “What breed of rabbit does best with children?” “What breed is most friendly?” “What breed is most intelligent?” Each individual rabbit has his own unique personality. Attempts to generalize about rabbit personalities by breed are no more accurate than attempts to generalize about humans based on race or ethnic background. Just as it is wise to consider personality rather than appearance when choosing a spouse, it is best to select your rabbit companion based on personality traits rather than breed or color.

As with humans, a rabbit’s **adult** personality is a combination of genetics (traits he was born with) and life experiences. Note the emphasis on adult. As with humans, personality continues to develop (and change) until he is an adult (approximately one year old). Most rabbits go through a major personality change when they reach adolescence and hormones kick in. Neutering or spaying, recommended for all companion rabbits, further alters the personality, usually for the better.

Most shelters and rescue groups can tell you something about each rabbit’s past history (unless he was a stray) and a lot about his personality. When you contact them to adopt a rabbit, be prepared to describe the type of personality you are looking for: Do you want a rabbit who is active or calm? Outgoing or shy? Independent or obedient? Affectionate or aloof? Easy-going or sensitive? Confident or hesitant? Curious or well-mannered? Which of these characteristics are most important to you? Volunteers with rescue groups and shelters act as matchmakers, doing their best to understand what personality traits you are looking for and identifying foster rabbits who fit that description.

Every rescued rabbit comes to us with a past history that, along with his personality, will determine how he responds to our love. Some who have been neglected and/or abused respond almost immediately to our love while others may take years to overcome past hurts and understand that not all humans are “the enemy.” Some who have been loved and have bonded with a human will easily transfer their affection to a new caretaker while others may be deeply hurt by being “abandoned” and take months or years to begin to trust a human again.

When I adopted Smokey, he had been neglected and was terribly skinny. I am convinced there were days he had no food. He cowered in the back of his cage and trembled when I held him. It took about a month of daily cuddling for him to become an outgoing, affectionate family member. However, despite the fact that he obviously knew he was loved and he never went a moment without food in his bowl, he always left a few pellets. Old habits die hard.





Stormy was five years old when he was carried into the shelter, cradled in his owner's arms like a baby — and abandoned. When I heard about him I sensed he would not survive long in the shelter. He immediately won my heart by continuing to be an amazing cuddle-bunny. He would lie in my arms for as long as I would hold him and shower me with bunny kisses afterwards.

I adopted Frankie, Goldie, and Murray when Smokey lost his five-month battle with cancer. They were named by their first foster-mom for frankincense, gold, and myrrh and they were truly my “three gifts.” They were rescued from horrible conditions — Frankie, my gorgeous tri-colored mini-rex was so dirty you couldn't tell what color he was. Goldie and Murray were believed to be littermates and had been together since birth. Goldie immediately came to us for attention, wanting to be held and petted. Murray definitely had a “don't touch me” attitude. I have always felt he really loved his first foster mom and was deeply hurt when she abandoned them. Murray soon developed a myriad of physical problems. This meant I had to handle him more frequently than most rabbits — and a lot more often than he liked. I always feared that perhaps, from his perspective, I really **was** torturing him. On July 4, 2001, more than three years after I adopted him, I received my first bunny kisses from him — while I was giving him fluids. Without question, he let me know that he understood how much he was loved.

